MARTIN'S ROADBLOCKS | BUSTING THE CHILD-SEX TRADE

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TV'S BAD BOYS

Behind the scenes of Trailer Park Boys, the trashy, sweet hit show

WARNING
This article is about the most foul-mouthed show on the dial

Jean Paul Tremblay, Mike Smith and Robb Wells

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Smith's Bubbles, a Plato-quoting cat-lover, is the soul of the series

STANDING BESIDE A WRESTLING RING made from dirty bedding, Bubbles wears his trademark inch-thick glasses and four different shades of the colour green. Sunnyvale Trailer Park's googlie-eyed scholar normally sports a plaid shirt and Dockers. But today, filming the upcoming fourth season of television's *Trailer Park Boys*, he's dressed like the Swamp Thing—mossy Dr. Martens, crocodile-print tights, khaki shorts and an emerald shirt, "GB" emblazoned across his chest in hockey tape. He parts the ropes, climbs into the ring and declares, "I'm the Green Bastard! From parts unknown!" Mike Smith, the actor behind Bubbles' glasses, can't help but chuckle. Cast and crew follow suit.

Episode 25 of the mock reality series on the Showcase channel is about backyard wrestling. Ricky (Robb Wells), the pomp-padoured thug who is one of the show's three main characters, expounds in a monologue: "The Green Bastard is Bubbles' wrestling name. He's really into it and he's got some pretty good moves, too. I'm glad I'm in the position where I can set something like this up." In this scene, Ricky has planned a celebration for Sunnyvale. His idea of fun entails bulldozer rides (real), a six-paper joint (fake) and urinating on a car (also fake, but the apple juice "piss rig" is convincing). One of the show's merchandising slogans is a mock parental advisory label that warns, "Trailer Park Boys: Extreme Behaviour." It's not an empty threat.

Over the past three years, the comedy show has earned a well-deserved reputation for radical vulgarity. The characters regularly deal drugs, film pornography and drink until they pass out. They've robbed supermarkets, liquor stores and gas stations, sometimes accidentally, and they go to jail at the end of every season. They also swear so much they've almost created their own Down East dialect. *Trailer Park Boys* is the rudest show on the dial, bar none, but, strangely, it's also one of the sweetest. And it's leapt from cult status to mainstream phenomenon in 21 episodes flat.

"At heart, it's really a family show," says Barrie Dunn, the co-producer who doubles as Ray, Ricky's father on the series. "Those who like it, like it a lot." Those who like it include BBC America, which is negotiating for distribution in the U.S. Although the series doesn't currently air south of the border, it has accrued American fans—Eddie Murphy, Kid Rock and *Mad TV*'s Will Sasso among them. There's also serious talk about

HOSER / n. Cdn. slang 1. an idiot; a goof. 2. An uncultivated person, esp. an unintelligent, inarticulate, beer-drinking lout.
(SOURCE: CANADIAN OXFORD DICTIONARY)

The characters of *Trailer Park Boys* are the latest in a proud Canadian tradition. It could even be argued that many of this country's ostensibly unaffected luminaries are hoserish at the core. Some heroes, and a few heroines—both fictional and real—of hoserhood:

STOMPIN' TOM CONNORS
The legend who penned *Bud the Spud* and *The Hockey Song* proved hosers can be patriotic, and lovable.

PETE AND JOEY FROM *GOIN' DOWN THE ROAD*
The two sad-sack Cape Bretoners hit Toronto's mean streets, and provided a hoser benchmark, in Don Shebib's 1970 film.

MIKE TOMPKINS (TOP); CP

producing a wide-release feature film. At home, with 300,000 viewers per episode, *Trailer Park Boys* is Showcase's second most popular series (after *Six Feet Under*). And the DVD of the first two seasons has sold upwards of 30,000 copies since its release in May.

The set is in an actual trailer park located a half-hour's drive from downtown Halifax. As Bubbles mugs inside the ring, the show's female leads, Lucy (Lucy DeCoutere) and Sarah (Sarah E. Dunsworth), pretend to wrestle until Lucy hits the mattresses. But after director Mike Clattenburg calls "Cut," the women seem unable to turn off the trash-talk. "Where did these mattresses come from, Mike?" asks DeCoutere. "The rub 'n' tug?" Dunsworth crinkles her nose: "I think someone peed over there," she agrees. Later, when Clattenburg instructs the women on which wrestling moves look best for the small screen, DeCoutere retorts, "Anything else you'd like us to bang together?" Pat Roach, the actor who plays Randy, the cheeseburger-eating, permanently shirtless weekend trailer-park supervisor, shakes his head. "Class," Roach mutters under his breath. "All class."

But he's smiling.

THE NEXT SEASON debuts in April 2004, and was shot with the show's biggest budget yet: $1.8 million. That's a pittance in TV land. An episode of *Trailer Park Boys* costs less than a quarter of what Jennifer Aniston earns every week for flapping her arms on *Friends*. But Clattenburg, 36, and co-writers Wells, 32, and Jean Paul Tremblay, 35, who plays Julian, the third main character, have turned their meagre overhead into a virtue. *Trailer Park Boys* is a mock reality show in the vein of *This is Spinal Tap*, mixed with *Cops*, *Jackass* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*. It looks cheap, but it's *supposed* to. In the series, fictional filmmakers have come to Sunnyvale to produce a documentary about Julian's life. As the camera follows him, the audience is introduced to his friends, like Ricky and Bubbles, and enemies, like Jim Lahey (John Dunsworth), the trailer park supervisor and the show's version of Boss Hogg. As Sunnyvale's exasperated father figure, Julian is a black-clad straight man whose get-rich-quick schemes have involved bootlegging vodka, stealing barbecues and selling hash to prison guards. But Ricky, the show's clown, inevitably fumbles the plans in spectacular fashion. Meanwhile, Bubbles adopts stray cats and is the soul of the series, comfortable referencing Plato and *The Catcher in the Rye*. Other characters include Trinity (Jeanna Harrison), Ricky's cigarette-smoking nine-year-old daughter, and J-Roc (Jonathan Torrens), a hip-hop-loving white kid who thinks he's black. In one episode, he tells Julian: "Me 'n T know that when you was up in Oz, you lost your honeywagon." Translated, that means, "We understand you misplaced your automobile when you were incarcerated."

If his characters weren't so cartoonish, Clattenburg could be accused of ridiculing trailer-park people—something he adamantly denies. "The idea isn't to make trailer parks look bad or have fun at their expense," says the Nova Scota native. "It's about the people

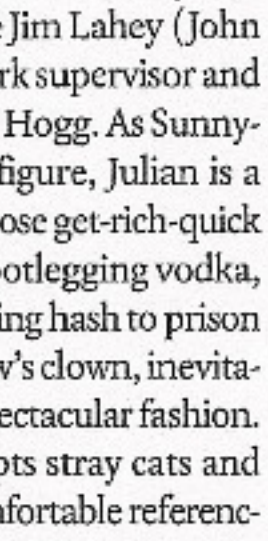
MORE PARK PEOPLE

Besides Julian, Ricky and Bubbles, the park is home to several other moral and mental cases

LUCY (Lucy DeCoutere)

Occupation: hair salon co-owner; also, Ricky's ex-girlfriend and mother of their daughter
Biggest vice: dangerously stupid men
Wants: to raise her daughter to be smarter than Ricky

SARAH (Sarah E. Dunsworth)



Occupation: hair salon co-owner; also, Ricky's ex-girlfriend and Lucy's roommate
Biggest vice: supporting Lucy
Wants: Lucy to raise her daughter to be smarter than Ricky

LAHEY (John Dunsworth)

Occupation: trailer-park supervisor
Biggest vice: alcohol
Wants: to lock up Ricky in "con college"

CORY (Cory Bowles)

Occupation: scapegoat
Biggest vice: joints, bottle tokes
Wants: to be liked by Ricky and Julian

J-ROC (Jonathan Torrens)

Occupation: Hip-hop MC
Biggest vice: homemade porn
Wants: to be famous for his rap skills

TREVOR (Michael Jackson)

Occupation: scapegoat
Biggest vice: joints, bottle tokes
Wants: to be liked by Ricky and Julian, but slightly less desperately than Cory

RANDY (Pat Roach)

Occupation: weekend trailer-park supervisor
Biggest vice: cheeseburgers
Wants: nothing. Since his recent promotion, he's been pretty much fulfilled

BARB (Shelley Thompson)

Occupation: owner, Sunnyvale Trailer Park; also, ex-wife of Jim Lahey
Biggest vice: luckless, balding men
Wants: to clean up the park

RAY (Barrie Dunn)

Occupation: on some sort of disability
Biggest vice: pepperoni sticks
Wants: Ricky to get religion

J.D.

RELIC Nick Adonidas's arch rival on *The Beachcombers*, played by the late Robert Clothier, was a grumpy log-pilferer.

MEL LASTMAN Not a beer drinker, and smart enough to make millions, but the guffaws are too numerous to mention. Now that he's out of Toronto politics, maybe he can star in his own reality series.

CHARLIE FARQUHARSON Don Herron's country bumpkin was a hokey hoser—a perfect fit for the American TV series *Hee Haw*, where he spent nearly two decades.

BOB AND DOUG McKENZIE Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas hit every hoser stereotype while pounding back a few cold ones in SCTV's *The Great White North* skits and film.

PAMELA ANDERSON Reigning fantasy girl of the dimwit tribe, she's a true hoserette—a five-time *Playboy* cover

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: MIKE TOMPKINS; CP; CP; MIKE TOMPKINS

on the show playing the card they're dealt. That's why it's so important for them to speak in the vernacular. All of us have grown up with swearing. Some of us developed an ear for it."

Friends since high school, Clattenburg, Tremblay and Wells call each other "professional swearists," which they define as people with the ability to curse without meaning offence. That particular Atlantic Canadian art form is acquired, and Clattenburg doesn't skimp on opportunities for his actors to learn the skill. In last season's finale, the cast cursed more than 86 times—not including gestures or the title of the episode, "A Shit Leopard Can't Change Its Spots"—which works out to almost four swear words per minute. That's about average for one of the series' installments. By way of contrast, in "What in the Fuck Happened to Our Trailer Park?" the cast used "fuck" alone more than 91 times—also not counting flipping the bird, or the show's title. The actors make their obscenities work overtime, employing the four-letter word as a noun, adverb, adjective, declarative and gerund. "Whenever we wrap a season," says Wells, "I find I've got to be careful or I'll wind up swearing in front of a bunch of kids."

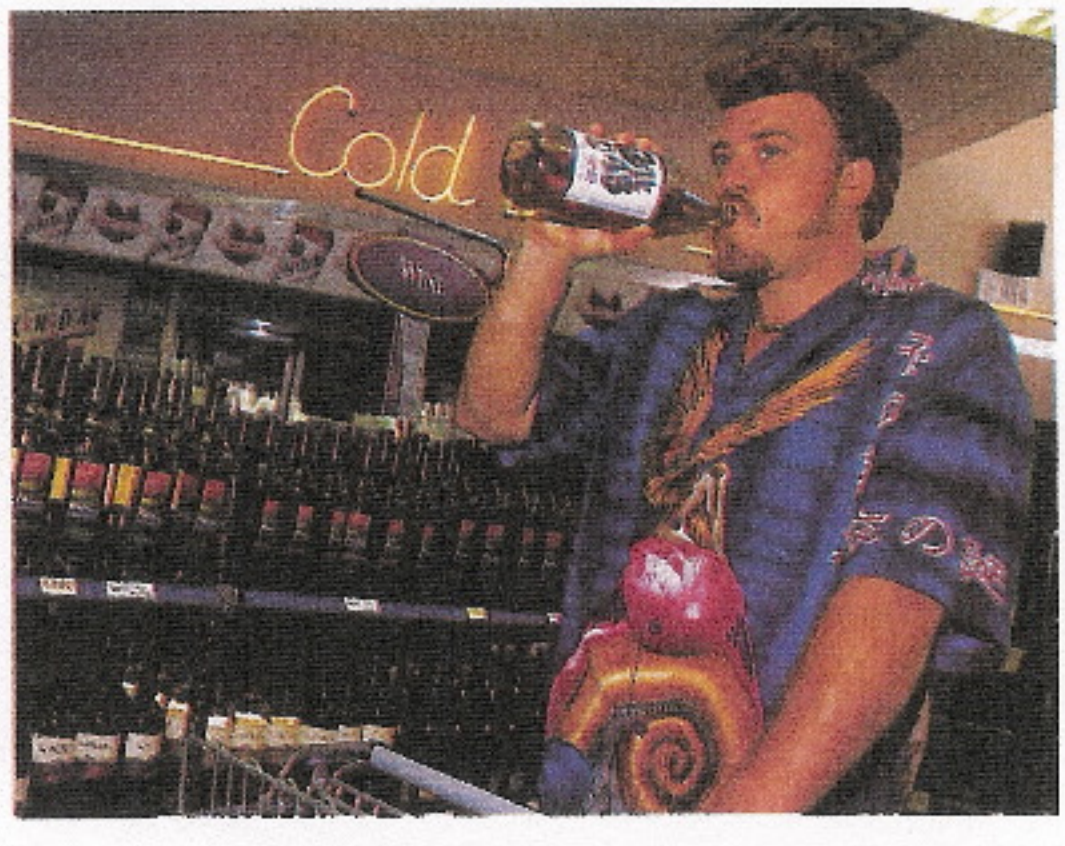
The series is packed with attention to detail. Julian is rarely without a topped-off glass of rum and Coke, which he never spills, even when fleeing police in a car. Bubbles always grunts and lifts his index finger when he's excited. Ricky subsists on chicken fingers, pepperoni and pot, and, whenever he feels he's won an argument, punishes the loser by asking for cigarettes. Because much of the show is improvised, the three stars are so accustomed to being Julian, Bubbles and Ricky that they refuse to do many print or TV interviews *out* of character. Tremblay and Wells often refer to each other as Julian and Ricky.

This is unnerving to witness. It's also the reason why some viewers mistakenly believe what they're watching is real. In the off-season, Pat Roach is often given cheeseburgers as gifts, while Tremblay can't go to a bar without people buying him rum and Cokes. And when Wells, Tremblay and Smith toured Canada last winter as the opening act for Our Lady Peace, audiences routinely pelted them with bags of weed. "It's insane—I've had kids tell me they want to live in a trailer park," Tremblay says. Wells once met a guy who said he "knew Ricky" from prison (the show is popular with inmates). And while waiting to testify at a friend's trial, Tremblay and Wells were accosted by a Crown counsel who told them, "Oh, I know why *you're* here"—the previous evening was the finale of the first season, which involved a robbery and a near-riot at a wedding.

BEFORE THE TRAILER PARK, there were J.R. Capone's and Goodfellas. Wells, Tremblay and Roach co-owned the gangster-named pizza franchise and nearby pub in Charlottetown, where they spent their downtime shooting videos of sketch material and sending them to Clattenburg in Halifax. On the strength of their footage, the director decided to make a short film. Called *One*

RICKYISMS

Ricky (Robb Wells) is known for his malapropisms. After kidnapping Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson in the third season, he asks the guitarist to play that "Diane Sawyer song." He meant the Rush hit *Tom Sawyer*, but that's just the way Ricky's brain works. Some other favourites:



"Supply and command"
—Ricky's understanding of economics

"Sweet-and-power chicken"
—his preferred Chinese dish

"Plutonium kind of love"
—Ricky's idea of non-physical relationships

"Cubic Zarcarbian"
—a substance he doesn't want in his engagement ring

"Denial and error" —the process through which Ricky learned to grow marijuana

"Liberry" —where he goes to study the science of "horvaculture"

"Child reports" —payments Ricky must make to support his daughter

"Ka-hay-kee"
—the colour military brown in his rainbow

"Rocket appliance"
—a difficult subject for Ricky to learn

"Your majesty" —how Ricky refers to a judge when he and the boys are arraigned on charges of running an illegal gas station J.D.

girl who contracted hepatitis, she says, while getting tattooed with her ex, and who reportedly has had breast enhancement, then reduction and then more enhancement.

DAKEY DUNN Mary Walsh's male correspondent character on *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. Gold chain, hairy chest, cigarette and beer. Need we say more?

RED GREEN Clad in plaid, Steve Smith's enduring character added duct tape to the hoser arsenal.

FELIX HOLTMANN In 1990 the Manitoba pig farmer and MP established a hoser aesthetic: he castigated the National Gallery for buying a work by renowned U.S. artist Barnett Newman. Holtmann argued anyone with two cans of paint and a roller could have made it.

WAYNE AND GARTH Canadian Mike Myers and his American partner-in-inanity,

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MIKE TOMPKINS; PARAMOUNT/THE KOBAL COLLECTION; CBC

Last Shot, it premiered at the Atlantic Film Festival in 1998. The audience responded enthusiastically to the early, rough versions of Ricky and Julian, and Clattenburg parlayed his own enthusiasm for the characters into a feature-length film. The movie, which had a limited release, was the genesis of the series. In 2000, Clattenburg and Dunn founded Trailer Park Productions Ltd. and shopped the pilot episode of the TV series around Toronto. After several networks rejected the show, Dunn and Clattenburg were despondent about returning to Halifax empty-handed. But they decided to hit up Showcase—one of the few places they hadn't contacted. They cold-called Laura Michalchyshyn, senior vice-president of programming at the network. "Obviously, she must have been drunk," Dunn recalls, "what network executive answers her own phone? But she gave us a shot. We were in her office 25 minutes later, pitching the show off the cuff. She got it. It was a gift from the gods."

Tremblay, Smith, Wells and Clattenburg amid the boys' marijuana crop

Mike Smith worked as the soundman on the *Trailer Park Boys* film, entertaining the cast and crew with his bumpkin act—the nearly blind rube with a heart of gold. Later, when the series was greenlighted, Clattenburg, Wells and Tremblay wrote Bubbles into the show. The glasses are Smith's own; his ex-girlfriend bought them for him as a joke when they were in Texas (Smith was on tour at the time, playing guitar in East Coast rock band Sandbox). For the fourth season, recognizing his contribution—without Bubbles, there'd be no *Trailer Park Boys*—Clattenburg, Wells and Tremblay asked Smith to be a fellow co-writer. "We're a lot funnier when we're just joking around," says Smith, 31. A lot more profane, too, he adds—"We've actually got to tone it down for the show."

As next season starts, Ricky's been appointed trailer park supervisor. Lahey, Randy and Julian are freshly out of jail. While the three were in prison, Ricky was up to his usual shenanigans, growing a fantastic amount of marijuana (they shot in a dope field somewhere in New Brunswick). Unfortunately, something's been eating the weed—perhaps a sasquatch.

Despite the petty crime, foul language and sheer dumbness, *Trailer Park Boys* appeals because its characters are bizarrely adorable. In a single episode, Ricky goes from berating Cory and Trevor for not knowing the differences between gasolines ("What are you, stupid? You taste it! Unleaded tastes a little tangy, supreme is kind of sour and diesel tastes pretty good"), to sharing a loving moment with his daughter—over a split nicotine patch. Bubbles is forever reminding Ricky and Julian that all they've got is each other but, in one episode, Lahey summarizes the show's family element most coherently: "Who in this park, or even who in the whole world, doesn't have problems? Who doesn't have a drink too many times once in a while and maybe even winds up passed out in their own driveway, pissing themselves? Who doesn't drink too much sometimes or who doesn't have a puff from time to time? And who doesn't have problems with the people they love? This is our home. This is our community!" Lahey delivers this speech drunk, of course. In Clattenburg's bombed but peculiarly compassionate trailer park, nothing else would make sense.

GALS LOVING *BOYS*

The show focuses on loser men and their loutish ways, yet 30 per cent of *Trailer Park Boys'* audience are females. Perhaps they just want to know the enemy. Among the women who love the boys are:

GAIL PINCH
57, administrative assistant, Vancouver
I didn't like the show at first, but was hooked after about six minutes. Growing up I met a couple of guys like Ricky—the guy with that semi-criminal mind but unable to pull off the big plan. They were never my closest friends.

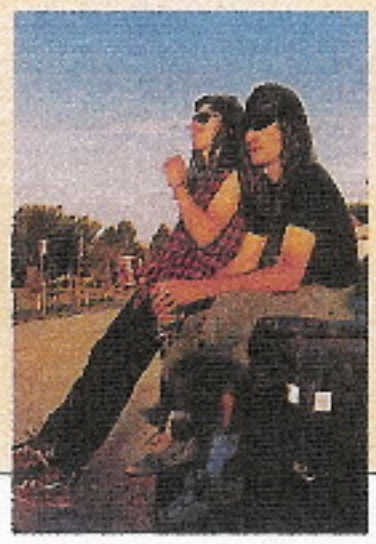
LOUISE LAWSON
36, high-school teacher, Toronto
I grew up in a small town and find the characters to be pretty close to real life. Julian is like all the cool guys who did high school in six years. I love the great business ideas that only make perfect sense if you have a criminal mind.

BROOKE THORSTEINSON
26, staffer at *Cannabis Culture* magazine, Vancouver
I especially like Bubbles. How can you not find a guy who quotes Plato and looks retarded funny? These aren't guys I'd date, but there's no denying anyone would find them funny. OK, well maybe not my parents.

PLUME LATRAVERSE
Québécois singer who used to drink a two-four onstage. *Vive le hoseur.*

BOBBY CLOBBER Dave Broadfoot's dumb-ass hockey player from *Royal Canadian Air Farce.*

TERRY AND DEAN The duo from Calgary who shotgun a beer in five seconds in the mockumentary *Fubar* (for the uninitiated, to shot-gun a beer you punch a hole in the can, flip the tab and inhale).



RUTT AND TUKE
Canadian moose brothers, inspired by Bob and Doug McKenzie—and voiced by Moranis and Thomas—in new Disney flick *Brother Bear.* JOHN INTINI

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF MIKE CLATTENBURG; COURTESY OF TARA PINCH; COURTESY OF BUENAVISTA PICTURES; CP

CANADIAN

MOBILE HOMIES

The cast of *Trailer Park Boys* photographed by MACKENZIE STROH at The Lord Nelson Hotel and Suites in Halifax on September 5, 2003 (L-R, back row): Trevor (Michael Jackson), Cory (Cory Bowles), Julian (Jean Paul Tremblay), Barb Lahey (Shelley Thompson) (L-R, middle row): Sarah (Sarah Dunsworth), Lucy (Lucy DeCoutere), Bubbles (Mike Smith), Ray (Barrie Dunn), Ricky (Robb Wells) (L-R, on the floor): Randy (Pat Roach), Jim Lahey (John Dunsworth) Missing: J-Roc (Jonathan Torrens)

CRUDE

JONATHAN DURBIN goes east to get the lowdown on *Trailer Park Boys* and its phenomenal success